

Section A. A Message from the Board of Trustees of MHMRA of Harris County

We the Board of Trustees have looked upon the process of strategic planning as an opportunity for reflection upon and refocusing of mission, goals, and priorities of the Mental Health Mental Retardation Authority (MHMRA) of Harris County. Unfortunately, the planning process must take into account an imminent reduction of MHMRA resources.

The necessity for undertaking strategic planning has been made more urgent by the budgetary crisis declared by the Governor. Members of the 78th Texas Legislature currently deliberating in Austin must come to grips with a projected budgetary shortfall of at least 10 billion dollars, the largest deficit in state history.

Appropriations for most publicly funded entities in Texas are expected to contract, by at least ten percent, for the current fiscal year. This means that one year's worth of dramatic cutbacks must be accommodated during the next six months. Appropriations for the next fiscal year will also reflect the effects of the current crisis.

These cutbacks will be especially hard for the MHMRA of Harris County to absorb. Historically, MHMRA has not been allocated an equitable share of the state budget. This has resulted in the chronic under-funding of services in Harris County. Before the statewide shortfall was recognized, moreover, the Authority had been experiencing deficits.

Clearly, due to the chronic and acute constraints on the Authority's budget, deficits of any kind are intolerable. If any item cannot clearly be justified by the value it adds to the community, it will have to be reduced, suspended, or eliminated. As a result, some services and supports may be delayed, disrupted, or even discontinued.

These hard choices about budget priorities are made more difficult because they must be implemented at once. If and when changes to available services occur, however, we want to be confident—and we want to instill confidence in the community—that none of the program changes are arbitrary, that none of the proposed cuts are simply across-the-board actions taken without reference to impact. Thus, instead of simply announcing cuts and changes, this plan sets forth a disciplined approach to making such difficult decisions.

Ideally, an organization undertakes strategic planning when resources are stable, perhaps even poised to expand, so that the process can account for hopes rather than fears. In such circumstances, a plan can reflect a vision of where leaders want an organization to go. Unfortunately, the process of strategic planning for MHMRA of Harris County comes at a time when public resources for mental health and disability services are contracting, perhaps permanently. Therefore, this strategic plan indicates our estimation of where MHMRA must go within the next one to three years.

Among the major intended results of this strategic planning process is to streamline administrative overhead, in order to fully utilize and maximize each dollar for services. The main object of this planning process is to fully identify key issues, in order to achieve our goal of a dynamic, flexible agency that can adapt to meet the needs of its consumers.

In addition to reflecting the views of the Board, this strategic plan incorporates opinions of Authority administrators and recommendations from knowledgeable consumers, families, and advocates, as represented by the members of advisory councils. MHMRA is committed to act in a partnership of consumers and family members, service providers, and policy makers to maintain service options responsive to individual needs and preferences.

Yet, we the Board take seriously our responsibility to review the mission, goals, and priorities of the Authority and, if necessary, to set a new course. To achieve our goals, MHMRA will continue to refine our infrastructure and internal support systems and to establish external links with providers and the community. Our work is the more urgent because of the budgetary realities that affect us all. Choices about budgetary priorities are always difficult. Yet, the fact remains that public resources for mental health and disability services are shrinking. We are committed to insuring that the Authority uses all its resources creatively, to seek out opportunities and to implement approaches that will increase the effectiveness with which it serves the people of Harris County. Thus, we are redoubling our efforts to seek out new funding sources and to husband those currently available.

Make no mistake: the MHMRA of Harris County will continue to provide quality services to its consumers. Indeed, by undertaking this strategic planning process now, the Authority will be better poised to improve services and increase effectiveness.

Signed,

MHMRA Board of Trustees

----- Lynne Cleveland, Chairman

----- Mae F. McMillan, M.D., Vice Chairman

----- Paige Michael Cokinos, Secretary

----- Jane Cherry

----- Alfred H. Forsten

----- Tom Hamilton

----- Tracy Friedman Stein

----- Gerald W. Womack